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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT HIGHLIGHTS USG INTEREST IN SAN ANDRES

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador traveled to San Andres, Colombia on September 22-23, to highlight U.S. interest in San Andres and discuss how the United States can best support the development of the island. The Ambassador was briefed by the Governor, leaders in conservation and tourism, leaders of the Afro-Colombian Raizal community regarding challenges facing its community, and local military and police commanders about narcotics trafficking activities in and around the island. The Ambassador visited the Universidad Nacional Caribbean branch and made a book donation to a local bilingual grade school. San Andres' immediate future will be determined by three current fault lines: 1) Native Raizal community vs. Colombian mainlanders; 2) Colombia vs. Nicaraguan sovereignty claims; and, 3) San Andres leadership vs. narcotics trafficking industry. End Summary

Working Luncheon with the Governor

¶2. (U) The Ambassador attended a working luncheon with the Governor of San Andres on September 22. This meeting framed his trip to the island with discussions on tourism, bilingualism, conservationism, Afro-Colombian issues, and drug trafficking in San Andres. The Governor confirmed that tourism was vital to the island's development and informed the Ambassador that his office had been in close contact with Spirit Airlines and Royal Caribbean. He also noted that the Vice President of Spirit Airlines informed him that the company would add a direct flight from Fort Lauderdale to San Andres starting next year. The Governor discussed the lack of English language used in the tourism industry in recent years. He stated that English was slowly disappearing on the island, and that the tourism industry caters mostly to Spanish-speaking mainland Colombians.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador emphasized USG disposition to cooperate with San Andres on tourism. He highlighted that bilingualism was one of San Andres' strongest assets, and noted that the United States would support efforts to bring mainland Colombians to San Andres and Providence islands to learn English.

English Immersion Programs in San Andres

¶4. (U) The Ambassador visited Universidad Nacional's Caribbean branch to learn about the University's English Immersion program. The vice-rector of Universidad Nacional and the University Director of the Caribbean branch explained that the program began five years ago and annually benefits about 60-70 public school teachers who learn English in classes with native English speakers. San Andres' native English speakers are the Raizal community.

¶5. (U) The Ambassador addressed, in his speech to the university's professors and staff, the importance of creating English projects

in San Andres as a way to strengthen economic development within the archipelago. He emphasized that English will provide greater opportunities for advanced studies and academic achievement. The Ambassador noted that the Embassy is investigating ways to expand English teaching programs through increased English scholarships, teacher training, donations of resources and materials, and exchanges for Colombian teachers.

Native Raizal Community vs. Colombian Mainlanders

¶6. (U) The Ambassador met with leaders from the Afro-Colombian Raizal community and the Governor to discuss the challenges that face the Raizal community. The Raizal population is a protestant Afro-Caribbean Colombian ethnic group that speaks English Creole and lives in the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia, and Santa Catalina. In 1903, the local Raizal population rejected an offer from the United States to separate from Colombia when the U.S. declared Panama an independent nation. Following the rejection, according to the Raizal leaders, the Colombian government led an assimilation policy to modify the ethnic composition within the Archipelago with Spanish-speaking mainland Colombians. This policy resulted in an ethnic divide between the Raizal community and the Colombian mainlanders.

¶7. (SBU) The Raizal leaders acknowledged that the community considers itself an underrepresented minority at both the local and national level. They conversed about their feelings of being an endangered community that fears it will lose its cultural identity. The majority of Raizales suffer from high unemployment and lack of

income and economic generating opportunities to improve their livelihoods. There has been a surge of domestic violence against women, teenage pregnancy, single parent families raised mostly by women, and an increase in illegal activities related to drug trafficking. The leaders emphasized that there is a lack of political representation to assist them in addressing these issues.

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador underscored the need for the Raizal leaders to design a development plan and to look into the possibility of existing programs through USAID and PAS to support the community and to help improve their representation, economic opportunities and living conditions. The Ambassador reiterated the continued USG commitment to Afro-Colombian issues throughout Colombia.

Colombian vs. Nicaraguan Sovereignty Claims

¶9. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of sovereignty claims over the San Andres Archipelago during a joint meeting with the local naval and police commanders on September 23. The Colombian Naval Commander emphasized that the International Court of Justice ruled in favor of Colombia's sovereignty over the San Andres Archipelago, but the maritime issues were yet to be resolved. There have not been confrontations between Nicaraguan and Colombian Navies, and the Colombian Coast Guard is able to patrol the territorial waters of the San Andres Archipelago without any quarrels from Nicaragua.

San Andres Leadership vs. Narcotics Trafficking Industry

¶10. (SBU) During the luncheon with the Governor, the Ambassador inquired about the magnitude of the narcotics trafficking problem on the island. The Governor stressed drug trafficking in San Andres is a major problem, San Andres has problems with both drug trafficking and internal consumption. He informed the Ambassador of an initiative he was proposing called "Seawatchers" which would provide artisanal fishermen with government support, including improved equipment and housing conditions, in exchange for the fishermen agreeing to use a monitoring device that would allow the government to track the locations of their vessels at all times. The Governor concluded that San Andres' leaders are in control of the situation and are working to reduce narcotics trafficking in San Andres.

¶11. (SBU) Throughout the joint meeting with the local naval and police commanders, the group highlighted that the Colombian National Police, Navy and Air Force are working with DEA to combat the drug trafficking problem. They pointed out that the San Andres

Archipelago represents unique narcotics trafficking opportunities between mainland Colombia and the Central American corridor. The number of seizures this year has increased and they anticipate greater success in the coming years. They stressed the importance of working with DEA and their desire to increase the presence of DEA in San Andres, even suggesting opening a satellite office staffed by DEA. The commanders appealed for more technical support for cellular and radio equipment.

Book Donation to Brooks Hill Bilingual School

¶12. (U) The Ambassador donated a set of books to the library of the Brooks Hill Bilingual School on September 23. Brooks Hill Bilingual School is the first school to pilot an extensive bilingual curriculum in San Andres promoted by the Ministry of Education and the local Secretary of Education. The Ambassador gave a speech to about 400 teachers and students (kindergarten to eleventh grade) on the importance of learning a second language and the opportunities offered by knowledge of another language.

Luncheon with the Tourism Industry

¶13. (U) The Ambassador attended a working luncheon, hosted by the Colombian Chamber of Commerce, with twelve local leaders in the tourism industry. The leaders expressed gratitude for the Ambassador's visit to San Andres and noted that it was the first official visit by a U.S. Ambassador. They voiced interest in strengthening commercial relationships with the United States and the desire to increase tourism to the island. The leaders expressed interest in participating in trade expositions and fairs as a means to establish relationships with U.S. companies. They acknowledged the poor infrastructure in the island, but wanted to improve it to help develop additional potential business

opportunities.

¶14. (U) The Ambassador described U.S. Major League baseball's winter leagues in Latin America. There are currently leagues in Venezuela, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. We are exploring a Colombian league. He suggested San Andres might explore such a team.

¶15. (U) The Ambassador also met with the Director of Food Inspection and Control of the Health Secretary, who explained the USAID-sponsored program to improve sanitation standards in restaurants and food chains. The director noted that 31 restaurants received USAID-sponsored training and noted that the restaurant where the working luncheon took place was a beneficiary of the program.

Conservation Project with CORALINA

¶16. (U) The Ambassador attended a meeting with members of CORALINA- The Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina- to discuss the issues facing the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve. Recognized by UNESCO in 2000, it is the largest marine protected area in the Caribbean and among the largest in the world. CORALINA works in collaboration with the government of San Andres to administer, protect and restore the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve. The Biosphere Reserve covers about 10% of the Caribbean Sea and includes costal mangrove swamps and coral reef areas.

¶17. (U) The director of CORALINA expressed that one of the major problems facing fisheries management in the archipelago is rampant poaching from foreign fishers in the region. Nicaraguan, Honduran, Jamaican, and Dominican fishing vessels are often identified as illegal fishers. CORALINA has worked extensively to plan and implement external boundaries, zoning and regulations within the Biosphere to reduce the damage created by human activities. The director noted that the Colombian Coast Guard works well with CORALINA to enforce the boundaries and zoning areas of the marine protected area. NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs has worked with CORALINA on regulation of queen conch, and gave a grant to develop a case study on how they maintain sustainable fisheries. NOAA will continue to work with CORALINA on management and enforcement training.

¶18. (U) The Ambassador underscored the success of CORALINA since its implementation in 1993. He recognized CORALINA's world leadership in marine protected management by conserving the natural resources of the archipelago and contributing to the economy of Colombia. The Ambassador noted the importance of conservation and USG continued efforts to support the preservation of the Biosphere reserve.

NICHOLS